CONTRADICTION AND INCONSISTENCY OF THE LIQUID MODERNITY IN TERMS OF THE CULTURE

Kontradykcja i niespójność kulturowa w płynnej nowoczesności

Abstract

Contradiction and inconsistency of the liquid modernity in terms of culture – the theme issues focus on contradictions in the cultural system of complex postmodern societies. Culture as a pattern of norms and values has paramount importance in building structure of social and individual life. As a result, the modernization is increasingly at odds with the real welfare unit, due to the impact of different voltages and incompatibility compared to the cultural trends and traditions. Issues of social progress become relative, because technological determinism is not offset by humanistic reflection for the purpose and meaning of social change. State of the permanent change leads to erosion and inconsistencies of relational activities, which does not meet the demands of integrity. Additionally, it increasingly resembles a performance or the theatre of everyday life. The reality of current civilization processes shows the fulfilment of negative vision created by some sociologist and humanists involved in the social prognosis. On the threshold of late modernity, they wrote about the future shock (A. Toffler) uncertainty (J.K. Galbraith) and discontinuities (P.F. Drucker). Accordingly, the achieved social status cannot be fully subjective. Contemporary, stratification forms approach society rather to the global pre-precaric existence than expected prosperity. In contrast, postmodernism culture is in a prominent manner, which intensifies threats and does not show the scenarios for the future of humanity.

Keywords: contradiction, cultural inconsistency, liquid modernity, postmodernism, society of the spectacle, indigo people

Streszczenie

Tematem niniejszego opracowania będą zagadnienia sprzeczności w systemie kulturowym dzisiejszych kompleksowych społeczeństw ponowoczesnych. Kultura, jako superwzorzec norm i wartości, ma pierwszorzędne znaczenie w budowaniu samej struktury społecznej, ale również indywidualnego sensu życia, opartego na użyteczności statusowej pełnionych ról. W wyniku oddziaływania różnych napięć oraz niezgodności prądów kulturowych z tradycją dokonująca się modernizacja coraz częściej pozostaje w sprzeczności z realnym dobrostanem jednostki. Zagadnienia postępu społecznego stają się więc relatywne, ponieważ determinizm technologiczny nie jest równoważony przez refleksję humanistyczną, dotyczącą celu i sensu zmian społecznych. Stan zmiany permanentnej prowadzi do zachwiania i niespójności działań relacyjnych, które nie odpowiadają już wymogom integralności, a coraz częściej przypominają spektakl albo teatr życia codziennego. Spełniają się w ten sposób negatywne wizje socjologów i humanistów zaangażowanych w prognostykę społeczną, którzy już u progu późnej nowoczesności pisali o szoku (A. Toffler), niepewności (J. Galbraith) czy nieciągłości (P.F. Drucker) jako realiach obrazujących nowe procesy cywilizacyjne. Z tego też względu społeczeństwa statusów osiąganych nie mogą w pełni cieszyć się podmiotowością. Współczesne formy stratyfikacyjne zbliżają więc społeczeństwa raczej do globalnej egzystencji prekarnej niż do zakładanego jeszcze niedawno dobrobytu. Natomiast postmodernizm kulturowy w wydatny sposób potęguje zagrożenia i nie daje odpowiedzi, co rzeczywiście czeka ludzkość w najbliższym czasie.

Słowa kluczowe: kontradykcje, niespójność kulturowa, szok kulturowy, postmodernizm, płynna nowoczesność, społeczeństwo spektaklu, ludzie indygo

Introduction

Contemporary systemic and structuralist approach to the society leads to the conclusion about the progressing specialization and functional differentiation of its individual elements. However, it does not mean the automatic increase of its progress or development. Specialization and particularism very often have the form of a change for worse, without introducing primary innovations in the very mode of action. It is worth mentioning that the development of the forms of socialization, which in fact has led to the current form of capitalism, begins to reach the edge, where the role of collectivism and cooperation becomes questioned. In such a society the man is far freer than in a traditional society, but they pay a high price for this freedom. Freedom means also unbearable loneliness, but it is not the only problem that the self – this identity that we create ourselves in the disintegrated, ambiguous world – needs to face (Wielecki 2012: 150). The reference to significant shortages in the area of collectivism will make room for the appearance of contradiction in the social system as a direct result of the inconsistency of its elements.

When starting analysing social contradictions, it is worth referring these issues to the notion of the criticism of the contemporary times, i.e. a negative reaction to social changes of great intensity, arising in connection with discrepancies. It seems that at the end of the 20th century, everyday experiences, public discussion and media include the critical thread concerning the changeability of life itself which is forced by modern formation, the state of being overwhelmed with the pace and aggressiveness of changes (Sztompka 2000a: 11). The trauma described this way will be a metaphor of inconsistency in the social system, and as such it will be placed on the continuum of anomie.

Canonical sociological texts which explain the subject of contradiction in the late capitalism are focused mainly on the complex issue of uncertainty, which is a constructive characteristic of human existence in this very period. The market of economic goods which is less and less subject to control, together with its impetus and global scale, is the best example here (Galbraith 1977: 261). The discrepancies of the capitalism system such as common development with enclaves of poverty, unbalanced distribution of goods and pauperization of hired workers are contradictions which cause growing concerns of the public opinion all over the world.

The postmodernist discourse itself to a great extent contests the objective modern findings concerning e.g. the essence of social cognition, i.e. the ones that are based on balanced individualism, rationalism, autonomy of a moral being. Also the independence from religious systems and centres of power would suit this optics. It is worth underlining that these values by being somehow institutionalized are even more questioned on the level of the current liquid approach to the late modernity (Kapciak 2006: 52). It should be emphasized that elementary culture changes are directly initiated by negation of both traditional and modern super-pattern.

The essence of social contradictions

Contradictions in philosophy, logic and other sciences are treated as discrepancies or paradoxes which then become a subject of many analyses and studies. What is important is that most of them seek its causes, effects and impacts. Also in sociology, contradictions seem to be an adequate element of description of the functioning of the society, especially in its conflict paradigm, visible in the complex society of late modernity. Contradiction (Latin *contradictio*) – in logic: a relation between two views, one of which claims something that the other denies; contradiction in a sense other than logical one sometimes is understood as a relation between phenomena, processes and decisions which are incompatible, impossible to be reconciled and mutually opposite (Szymanek 2008: 163). So in the social system contradictions will be understood as specific discrepancies observed in cultural relations in the form of social bonds and structural systems. It seems that the source of inconsistency lies in the very definition of the society, which generally departs from the ordering aspects and significantly prefers deinstitutionalization which is manifested in the focus on individualism and individualist perspective with nearly complete negation of collective values.

Contradictions are visible in many dimensions. Describing the contemporary society, often mutually contrary labels are used, which make it clear on how extended continuum the human being currently is placed. We may list such examples of this description as the following pairs: globalization-regionalization, centralization-decentralization, integration-disintegration (Borowik, Borowik 2003: 55). Different dimensions permeating one another show the multitude of alternatives of lifestyles and career paths. The pairs of opposite notions presented above constitute also a certain dimension of a social reaction to the imposed institutional models, which are not adopted by default, but rather with quite considerable dose of reflection connected with symbolization (Lash 2009: 178).

Inconsistency in the functioning of the social system is manifested especially in placing the man at the crossroad of decisions, constantly weighing arguments and conducting necessary categorizations. In the context of the lack of certainty as to the intentions of the interaction partner, unstableness of paid work and economic situation as well as national security, these issues will determine only a short-term horizon and *ad hoc* actions. It puts the man in a situation where many principles are not up-to-date anymore, some reference points and value systems obtained in the home culture become inadequate. The condition of the complete lack of certainty as to how to think, make and maintain the contact with environment and who colleagues are from the point of view of the social and organizational hierarchy appears. Even one's own identity becomes vague. Such a condition may lead to confusion, depression, sense of being lost and alienation (Witkowski, Łużniak 2003: 103). Such a broad approach to contradiction leads to the sense of emptiness and loneliness of the man in the contemporary social environment, which does no longer give them institutional support.

For the first time the concept of contradiction to define cultural inconsistency was introduced by sociologist Daniel Bell. He described established culture patterns of the American society (e.g. economization of market activities) and their erosion under the influence of modernization and development, finally leading to hedonism and typical spendthrift attitudes. This happens because culture as "the area of self-expression and self-gratification" to a great extent is based on the individualist identification of gratification in undertaken activities (Bell 2014: 15-17). Thus, disjunctive nature of the contemporary culture system results from the general discrepancy between the institutional systemic rules which set goals and the means of goods usage and consumption which are addressed by popular culture creating a travesty of the shape of the social structure, breaking with conventions and putting hedonism, individualism and innovativeness in their place.

The assertion about the spectacular form, identification of a society within a performance in the meaning of an artificially arranged event will be a paradoxical conclusion confirming the occurrence of contradiction. The life of societies with a modern system of production resembles a plethora of spectacles. Everything that formerly was directly experienced has now moved away and taken a form of a spectacle (Debord 2006: 33). A spectacle in its essence has a certain dose of artificiality which covers the inconsistencies in the society and attempts to derive some sense. Furthermore, it is a use of the areas of abstractions and illusions.

In the following part of this paper the author will present selected areas of social contradictions, connected with specific segments of the social system: paid work and general stratification pattern, network shape of social relations, technological progress, consumptionism and environmental awareness, progress in medicine and the essence of political institutions.

Selected areas of contemporary social contradictions

The most apparent contradiction connected with the society is that the whole masses of people are excluded from the market of goods and services. In the age of strictly capitalistic paradigm which creates the optics of functionality and utility, those excluded are perceived as a burden and unnecessary resources in the global market. The capitalistic market of goods and services does not develop harmoniously, so the areas of underdevelopment, poverty and impoverishment visibly increase (Mokrzycki 2001: 109). Discrepancies are manifested in this area through imperfection of market adaptation to capitals and capabilities of the members of the society. The contemporary society of the age of late modernity does not ensure the effectiveness of a career path or existential security by doing paid work. It seems that this is a leading contradiction among others, having its impact on the other dimensions of relations by determining basic modes of actions and behaviours.

Virtual reality, defining in a completely different way the cultural system, is an area present in almost every member of the society's life. According to classical anthropological differentiation from the field of axiological message, it will be a type of prefigurative culture, where young members of the society socialize the elderly ones (Mead 2000: 110). This very fact proves contradiction because such a phenomenon does not have any precedence in the history. Obtaining a kind of a cultural code from descendants is in a sense a reversal of the idea of pedagogy and cultural transmission, so it is a remarkable example of a contradiction compared with traditional approach of "moulding young minds" and passing knowledge.

Dysfunctionality of liquid modernity is mainly marked in the decrease of the significance of people's work in the achievement of their actual status. The phenomenon of long-term unemployment introduces here the term of "relevance" and "utility" of a human being for a capitalistic system, which by its nature is based on contract work. Therefore, those affected by the odium of unemployment experience the lack of fulfilment, the lack of own identity as a full member of the society, but on top of that the lack of sense of their own existence. It results in a sense of being unnecessary, rejected (Bauman 2005: 23). The problems of work will be then full of contradictions, which also results from the neoliberalism connected with postmodernism.

According to this economic paradigm, striving to profit and limiting costs has become a business goal of the highly developed economic systems. Such actions have lead, in addition to continuing growth of competitiveness and productivity, to huge discrepancies in employment and contract work. Uncertainty as to the ability to provide for oneself by working professionally and the lack of a defined career path, and accordingly any promotion and existential perspectives, has contributed to the rise of a new social class which is described in current sociology as precariat (Standing 2014: 44). The quality and durability of employment will be the key stratification problems and simultaneously a space for abuse and exploitation.

On the other hand, virtual reality constitutes indisputable evidence for the existence of artificiality as it was brought to life by means of IT solutions and programmes (Marody 2010: 41-43). The opposite of naturalness was made explicit on different websites, e.g. social media such as Facebook or Instagram, where unreal but perfectly concocted identities are presented, which are adapted to particular image needs connected with self-creation. Such presentation of one's own image is incompliant with the truth and objective picture of oneself.

A characteristic possession by the Internet is widely described by contemporary sociologists. It is a truism to say that the use of the network impacts all dimensions of social contacts and interactions. The problems of the network have become a domain of paradigms which have already been practically recognized as classical, i.e. the network society (Castells 2013: 89). This dimension of a liquid modernity significantly determines the recognition of the man's role and asks the question about the sense of the dimension of subjectivity.

At the same time, its declarative application is an improvement of communication (e.g. in the aspect of tasks or employees). Along with the growth of technological capacity of the network, a new problem has been identified: information overload and the integration of the Internet into almost every aspect of everyday existence. The network should reduce work, however, unfortunately, it causes a material increase of its scale which is reflected in the number of e-mails in the employee's electronic mailboxes behind which corporate instructions and tasks are *de facto* hidden. Again, one can see a significant contradiction between the demand for work effectiveness and the increase of its scale precisely by the use of electronic communication tools. It is a general negation of the popular and common expression of a so called "society of free time", which is treated as a paradox. Often, flexible work, declaratively moved out of a factory or an office, is moved to home and as such done permanently, which also proves the discrepancy between ideas and factual actions (Giermanowska 2013: 138). Thus, work more and more often is connected with suffering because it has become a rare good, and at the same time without it the man immerses in uselessness.

One of the most prominent American sociologists and futurologists – Alvin Toffler –describes in his works material contradictions of the developing postmodern society. He emphasizes the contradiction between the technological progress and the developed market of goods and services versus the increasing awareness of ecological threats which are connected with unstoppable consumption. To give a meaningful example of such contradiction: disposable packages for quick consumption introduced to the market are at the same time very detrimental to the environment, as they are made of plastic. Besides, so called single use goods, the repair of which is not cost-effective from the economic point of view, are sold. Such actions also cause

a huge increase of waste because goods which are already used are immediately thrown away. Such behaviours are described as a "short duration economy" and a "throw-away culture" (Toffler 1970: 56-58). If culture imposes on us determined patterns of consumption, fulfilment of which is connected with pollution (waste, smog) and degradation of the environment, there is a basic inconsistency between the satisfaction of one's need and the demand for sustainable development and integrity.

The threats related to pollution and degradation of environment are connected with a general change of the model of agriculture, whose shape is determined by economic principle of yield maximisation, concentration of crops and livestock. Intensification of production (big farms) results in the decrease of prices, but at the same time causes a threat of decreased quality of food. It will be connected with another topic: food processing and chemization, which in the post-industrial society seem to have achieved the highest level of intensity (Wallerstein 2004: 112). On the other hand, the environmentally-friendly trend is emerging, thanks to which more and more often biotechnologies, which are not a burden for the environment, are implemented.

The actions aimed at maximization described above are contrary to the healthy lifestyle, defined as theoretical models of well-being, called *slow life* or characterized with the use of a word *fit*. Bigger focus on one's health is also connected with the perception of civilizational threats brought by the developed world. The issues of healthcare, life quality and striving to maintain a good quality of health are partly forced by increasing attention to ones' image, where health starts being treated as another stratification dimension, telling others a lot about one's social position (Tobiasz-Adamczyk 1998: 20-21). The medical discourse will be one of the dimensions of chances and perspectives of current and future generations.

Referring to this discourse, it is worth noticing the tendency to remonstrate the findings of conventional medicine, which despite constant advancement unfortunately has not found a remedy for the real explosion of oncological diseases. This field has faced a specific contradiction – turning in extreme situations to witch doctors and so called natural, folk medicine, based only on organic products, or casting spells in quasi-occult practices (Piątkowski 2008: 219). As we can see, the awareness of threats connected with human life is constantly increasing; unfortunately it often stays in the sphere of declarations without transforming into an actual social change.

One of the most obvious contradictions of the contemporary times is visible in the world of politics, namely, recognition of the present political order as a permanent, the most desirable pattern, the apogee to which all state systems should aspire. Thesis of Francis Fukuyama about the end of history manifested by the introduction in majority of countries polyarchy, i.e. parliamentary democracy of mostly liberal attitude, has become one of the most well-known views of the turn of the 20th century. The collapse of the Soviet Union being an additional impulse to create such a political order was to eliminate a permanent tension between these two competing political and economic blocks (Fukuyama 2009: 64). As it quickly turned out, the proposed taxonomy of the end of history was an illusion, and the contradictions appearing (e.g. radicalization of politics, objection against globalization, threat of Islamic terrorism and Russian imperialism) caused the rejection of this notion.

To sum up this part, we can state that modernity "is proud of" the fragmentation of the world as its greatest achievement. In fact, fragmentation is a main source of power (Bauman 1995: 26). Such definition of the contemporary times fully describes the rise of contradictions as tensions between these fragments, where incompatibility of individual elements of culture is the most visible. Fragmentation also constitutes a challenge for social solidarity, which may be considered as a remedy for the arising contradictions (Lasch 1997: 95-96).

The contemporary man experiences all the benefits but also all the threats resulting from the actual existence of multiculturalism. They could be presented on the continuum of discrepancy-symbiosis. The dilemmas concerning the impact of many values include the issues of their mutual reconciliation as well as rivalry and conquer (Dołęga 2016: 39). Life strategies, adjusted to the present condition of culture, result in a mode of behaviour and actions characteristic to a human being in certain social relations.

The phenomenon of cultural inconsistency

The main expression of the contradiction in modern societies is the incompatibility with the role of social values, norms and the question of their universality. The emerging modernization forces individuals to tackle the acculturation problem, where culturally alien traditions collide with those universally applicable norms in the certain environment.

What is important, the legitimation of the societies existence and individuals takes place on the basis of their affirmation to culturally determined meaning. In the end, sense or lack of the sense is irrevocably culturally determined and highly dependent on the context, in which the evaluation is made (Hall 2001: 212). The definitions of humanity determined by culture are certainly expressed in the very construction of the social system and its structure. The manifestation of locating an individual in a given system will certainly be his expectations and aspirations to achieve culturally determined goals, such as the pursuit of social security and safe existence. However, the specific configuration of mental, business and purely selfish factors has made these senses meaningfully transformed and, in extreme cases, completely overreacted..

Modern society is usually considered from the point of view of globalism, and consequently, also the readiness to permanent social change. The constant openness and modality of the culture, ignoring the established patterns and the desire to attain progressive attributes, can lead to the cultural trauma, which is activated primarily in the form of unrest and crises in the present form of capitalism. The social (cultural) trauma can be used to consider the problem of negative, dysfunctional effects of extensive social change (Sztompka 2000b: 16). Conversions related to changes are primarily referring to the lack of proper income redistribution, which refers to the economic profit development.

Cultural incongruity can be regarded as an undeniable attribute of societies going through certain stages of development. Interestingly, in this approach culture does not simply follow change, and as such is no longer responsive to new born social needs. History of modernity is a story of tensions and clashes between existence and its culture. Modernism enslaves a certain "culture" to the point of resistance. Existance-cultural dissonance is the harmony, which modernity needs. The history of modernity derives its incredible and unprecedented dynamism from the speed which modern culture rejects the harmony versions, after previously discredited them as faded and deformed images of its *foci imaginarii*. This is why the history of modernity is recognized as the history of progress, and the natural history of mankind (Bauman 1995: 22-23). As it can be seen, the counter-arguments between the ever-growing and ever-evolving man and his developed cultural model are increasing, because human exploration of new sensations and pragmatic solutions must clash with established ways of modalities. The key issue is the notion of modalities of culture and its degree of adaptation to the prevailing conditions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the above-mentioned conclusions are presented on the unit-society continuum, which illustrates the importance of social change both in the individual and in the collective field. In contrast, the concepts that characterize this change, such as social development, welfare, contradiction, discontinuity, and inconsistency, are part of paradigmatic solutions from general theories in sociology such as functionalism, structuralism, conflict theories and exchange theories (eg. the theory of games). These terms reflect the multi-paradigm of sociology, as they are used to describe changes from different points of view and at the same time refer to structure and social system. In addition, attention to the cultural aspects of the individuals functioning draws our attention to issues of social subjectivity, which most clearly describes man's self-determination in his immediate environment (see Archer 2013: 57). In addition, this approach addresses the risks of discontinuity and inconsistency in the individual and social present circumstances.

Therefore, progressive development, which reflect the concepts of progressivism used in various sociological theories (eg. Evolutionism, convergence) has undoubtedly led to significant changes and improvements in the global environment. It is visible as an undeniable benefits of social progress, shown in more than double lengthening of life compared to earlier epochs. Apart of improvements, 'sides effects' have appeared, such as: environmental pollution or ecological issues. These changes, which character is rather relative (e.g.

Urbanization, consumerism, migration) became a difficult way to human welfare as an integral subject (Olszewska-Dyoniziak 2008: 86-91).

Relative dimensions of social progress lead to the conclusion of the development heterogeneity itself and the occurrence of the contradictions mentioned in the introduction. The sociological periodization of the society history guide to a gradual increase in support for the idea of individualism, which in itself is the supreme form of development, and as such become the system that will actually introduce personal freedom as the highest development value. It turned out that such individualism has its limits and can even be deeply destructive, revealing a form of narcissism and complete fixation on its own appearance or belonging to particular groups or communities (Olchanowski, Sieradzan 2011: 23).

It seems that the most important is the self-awareness and reflection about the dangers posed by consumerism or detachment from community values (Burakowska 1996: 87-88). In such a view, appears the passivity towards the existing culture combined with a dictate of productivity and consumption. In the context of increasingly dysfunctional social order, there is a need to overcome the increasing number of contradictions.

Specific social behaviors as a reaction to the contradictions, can be compared to symptoms of trauma: lack of trust in the institution, corruption, overgrowing bureaucracy and formalization (as a protection against non-functional relationships), passivity, apathy, sense of helplessness, the feeling of helplessness, the nostalgia of the old times, the susceptibility to confabulation, conspiracy and the sudden outbursts of social discontent (Sztompka 2000a: 20). These phenomena signal paradoxes of contradiction and distortion of the authentic meaning of human existence.

All of these characteristics allow the economic system (under contradictory conditions) to be termed as a spasmodic economy (ekospazm), where permanent balancing occurs at the edge of collapse and relative prosperity periods (Toffler 1977: 72). This economic feature will affect the other institutions by multiplying the sense of alienation and alienation.

In this aspect, the references to the essence of the human existence meaning seem to be crucial in times of rapid and counter-influential change. In the course of the development of reflections on social changes (including traumas), various psychological and sociological concepts assist individuals with reaffirming his own subjectivity and demonstrate ways to overcome existential emptiness. The example is undoubtedly logo therapy (Frankl 2010: 111; Frankl 2011: 165). The proposed form of therapy allows individuals to overcome the frustration that comes with interaction of conflicting cultural values.

Emerging existential questions, such as: what cultural alternatives should members choose in the terms of contradictions?; How to reconcile mutually exclusive solutions?; Do you follow trends that appear to be contradictory to your essence?, lead to a fundamental reflection on the shape of *homo futuris*. It is hoped that the new quality of social relations will emerge from the outlined contradiction and bring the awareness of how to solve the emerging contradictions. It will certainly require major changes and transposition in constructing a new social contract.

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